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ABSTRACT

This paper on student-teacher relationships is part of a study of black students at white colleges. The study was conducted at four predominantly white colleges in upstate New York during the 1969-70 school year and was financed by a grant from the Ford Foundation. The main purpose of the study was to report the black experience at white institutions from the point of view of black students. Colleges in diverse settings were chosen to provide a comparative perspective. Data were gathered from lengthy unstructured interviews with individual black students and from tape-recorded sessions of approximately ten students on each campus who met regularly throughout the school year. The results showed that many black students distrust white administrators and faculty members, believing them to be engaged in a conspiracy against blacks; and that black advisors are necessary and essential links of trust between black students and white institutions. (JW)

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The Student-Teacher Relationship Experienced by Black Students at White Colleges

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This paper on student-teacher relationships is part of a study of Black Students at White Colleges which will be reported in book form later this academic year. The study was conducted at four predominantly white colleges in Upstate New York during the 1969-70 school year and was financed by a grant from the Ford Foundation which is acknowledged with appreciation. The main purpose of the study was to report on the black experience at white institutions from the point of view of black students.

Included in the study were a four-year large private college located in a metropolitan area with a county-wide population of nearly 500,000, a two-year community college in the same area, a four-year state operated liberal arts college in a small city of 23,000, and a two-year technical school in a rural village. We identified these institutions as Cosmopolitan, Metropolitan, Small City and Little Village Colleges. Colleges in diverse settings and of varying circumstances were chosen to provide a comparative perspective. Names of colleges and their communities are fictitious to protect the anony-

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*Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Denver, Colorado, September 1, 1971. The paper is a condensed version of a chapter to appear in a forthcoming book by the author on BLACK STUDENTS AT WHITE COLLEGES.

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mity of individuals and the good will of the institutions.

Data were gathered from lengthy unstructured interviews with individual black students and from tape-recorded sessions of approximately ten students on each campus who met together regularly throughout the school year. During the spring of the study year, survey data were collected from a random sample of about 2 per cent of the white and 50 per cent of the black students on each of the four campuses. They were representative of all black and white students on the four college campuses.

The senior planners for the study were a black, a brown, and a white person. Hopefully, the varying experiences and backgrounds of the researchers had a self-correcting effect upon research policies and practices. The field interviewers also were black, brown and white persons -- graduate and undergraduate students who met together regularly to share their experiences and observations. Finally; the research staff consisted of a black student consultant on each campus who prepared a census of all black students, convened the bi-weekly discussion group of ten black students and, in general, vouched for the researchers from time to time as student suspicion waxed and waned.

Our universe of study was 384 black students who were less than two per cent of the combined student bodies of 26,750. To the black students at white colleges, we give our thanks and confess our admiration. We appreciate the fact that they finally took us into their confidence. We trust that this paper will faithfully tell their story and that it will be listened to with compassion and care.

Probably more significant than anything else in the educational process is the relationship between students and teachers. Also important are the

expectations which these members of the college community bring to these relationships and the extent to which they are fulfilled.

We found that most students talk about the faculty a great deal outside class, but their actual contact with faculty members outside the classroom is relatively low. Forty to 45 per cent of the students never conferred with a teacher during the course of a semester. Thus, two-thirds of all students believe that counselling and guidance assistance is impersonal and insufficient, and three-fourths feel that they get little, if any, help from faculty members and advisors. The proportion of black and white students voicing these complaints is similar.

The quality of the relationship between teachers and students tends to differ for blacks and whites. Indicators of the quality of the relationship are the kinds of problems with which students turn to teachers for assistance, the kinds of responses which teachers make, and the perceptions of these responses by students.

The proportion of white students is always larger than the proportion of black students who would turn to their teachers for positive academic guidance such as registering, choosing classes or instructors, buying books, and so on. For example, the 42 percent of white students who say that they seek advice from faculty members about choosing classes or instructors is twice as great as the 16 percent of black students who approach faculty members for this kind of assistance. Similar ratios are found between blacks and whites for other matters of academic guidance.

Probably one of the greatest differentiators between black and white students with reference to their instructors is the lack of trust which black students have in white teachers. This is indicated by the fact that only 36 percent of the black students believe that the teacher is the appropriate

person with whom to register a complaint about an academic problem like grades, compared with a majority (59 percent) of the white students. In fact, black students tend to turn to the dean and other administrative personnel to register a complaint about grades as often as they would turn directly to the teacher. This fact may be an indication, too, of a differential feeling which blacks have about teachers compared with administrators, an issue which will be discussed later.

Some complaints of black students are that white teachers ignore them. More frequent complaints are that white teachers do not comprehend the black experience and discourage black students from discussing and researching their racial heritage as an educational exercise. A few complaints charged outright discrimination.

A male student, Winifred, at Metropolitan College, estimates that about one-fourth of the teachers ignore black students. The lamentations of one student recount an experience of professorial avoidance. Coleman reports: "I tried to talk to him; he wouldn't talk to me. I went up to his office. He said he would meet me at 12:00 o'clock. I said, 'fine.' He never showed. I can't even get my paper back from him. He told me to go to the office to pick up my paper. He was in the cafeteria [one day] and he was rapping to these white kids, telling them about their assignment. Why didn't he come and sit down at my table and explain what this story was about?.... Then he goes into class and says 'blah, blah, blah' and so forth. Well sure, these white kids know all about it because they heard about it ahead of time." Ronald tells how a woman teacher walked away from him when he approached her for help and would not stop and acknowledge his presence until he swore at her. These experiences of disregard, avoidance, or refusal to

take notice of blacks by whites are interpreted by some students as due to lack of sympathy. In the words of Morris: "I think the white teachers do not sympathize with the black students or do not try to help them if they are having trouble or problems with...one or two subjects. They tend to overlook them and tell them to get it the best way they can."

Many students believe that the faculty and administration try to pacify black students rather than respond to their demands and needs. As Joseph puts it, "They use a lot of trickery." Others interpret any evasive action as "conspiracy." Lack of trust in white colleges was clearly revealed in these remarks of George who accuses the administration of Little Village College of "recruiting blacks indiscriminately" so that the ones of lesser ability would fail and then the special program for the recruitment of black students could be declared unsuccessful. "Trust-that's the main word," said a group of blacks. "Black students need someone they can trust." Alternately when the actions of faculty are seen to work in the black students' favor, such as giving them a strong benefit of the doubt, white faculty are viewed by the blacks as hypocritical and patronizing. Ben sums up the collective sentiment of his black colleagues this way: "What we need is for people to be honest with us."

It is the perception of many black students that white teachers are "uneasy" regarding racial discussions in class. Johnny said that the teachers in his school were unaware of the problems and responsibilities of black students and refused to relate to the black experience. He continued, "It's like this, man. I am black and I want to write about black people. When I do this, I learn more about my people and also I can tell it like it is. The professor doesn't understand, nor can he dig how we feel. He is against black kids writing about black people....I write about black people anyway.

My grade on the paper might not be very good; but that will not stop me. I might get it put to me in the end when final marks come around, but, like, that's okay, too." Phyllis, a third-year student studying at Cosmopolitan College faults the administration for being "ignorant of black needs and attitudes."

In a rap session of black students on campus, one attributed the low mark which the teacher gave his composition as due to the fact that the paper was "written from a black perspective" which the student claimed the professor "couldn't understand." A senior political science major at Small City College, Cliff, describes his teachers as "educated fools." He states that "so many of them are not used to the environments and conditions that black people have had to live through," and therefore, find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand blacks. He bemoans the fact that white teachers tend to think that a perspective which is different from their own is wrong. A black freshman tries to explain the lack of understanding of the black experience by white teachers in the following: "Like, I dig jazz. That's my whole life....Here, they don't do what I dig. In fact, I went to my music professor and I told him my thing. He said he liked it, but I guess he didn't like it enough, 'cause he never mentioned it in class.... There's a whole span of jazz that develops from blues. It's from here that the rhythm and blues stuff comes; rock originates from here. But they don't talk about it /at this school/." Oscar talks about another music related incident: "The English teacher assigned students /phonograph/ records to write about, all white rock and roll artists. When confronted as to why no black records were assigned, the teacher said: "I don't know any black records. I have never heard any." And so the story goes--blacks distrusting whites

and believing that whites are disinterested in black customs and culture. Whether or not whites are as disinterested as blacks assert that they are cannot be determined fully from the data at hand. However, it is clear that many blacks tend to perceive and believe whites to be thoroughly disinterested in the black experience. Perceptions and beliefs are critically important in determining black reactions to white college campuses, and especially their reactions to teachers and members of the college administration. Beliefs tend to father reality and therefore affect social relationships.

Tables 1 and 2 here

The percent of black student responses to questions on the faculty in the survey are shown in Tables 1 and 2. These data indicate that a lower proportion of black students, compared to white students, feel that faculty are willing to talk with students, maintain receptiveness to new ideas, or allow students to pursue their individual interests. Further, data presented in Table 2 indicate that a large proportion of black students do not feel that faculty evaluate their work fairly. For example, Charlene, felt that her speech teacher always found something wrong with her presentation whenever it had anything to do with the black experience and Dave felt that one of his teachers ganged up with the white students against him whenever the classroom discussinn drifted to the subject of race.

Some blacks have had more pleasant experiences at these schools and thus are more positive about their campus community. A few students even report that the administration in many instances appears to be leaning over backwards to give blacks the benefit of the doubt. On one campus, for example,

a b[illegible]dent believed the office of the dean to be somewhat more lenient with blacks compared with whites in calling in students for conferences about cutting classes. Members of the administration gathered the most kudoes from the black students. They tended to be characterized as "cooperative" or "fair" or "understanding" or "easy to approach" by those students who are favorably disposed toward administrators. Not all black students are favorably disposed to the administration. But black students who have had good experiences with members of the college administration expressed regret that they tend not to come into contact with officials unless there is a confrontation.

Blacks expect to receive more understanding from administrative officers and less cooperation from the faculty. At one institution the black students described the administration as "liberal" and the faculty as "conservative." At another school, black students had this to say about their instructors: "...The hard core faculty members do not want to have a damn thing to do with students....They don't want students on their damn committees. And when the shit comes down, the teachers don't want anything to do with black students at all or any of their problems."

While blacks have more confidence and faith in administrators, this faith also is shaky. For example, nearly one out of every two black students believes that the administration is intolerant of student protests and suggestions for changing the school. This means that on white college campuses, black advisors and faculty members are essential if black students are to have any confidence in the operation of the institution. The black advisor has been varyingly described as "someone you can talk to," "a source of information," "really concerned," "someone with whom you can identify," and "someone who can ease the pain a little bit." The important counselling

function which a black advisor performs on a white college campus is best described in the words of Henry: "/The black advisor/ has brought the black community at this school together. I was very excited when we heard that /a black advisor/ was coming, because this was a start. I usually talk to /the black advisor/ twice a week. /The advisor/ shows initiative and passes on the initiative to us. It is like having a black person looking over you, telling you where it's at. If you don't study or if you goof off, /the advisor/ tells you that you're not acting like a black man. If teachers have any problems or questions, they call /the black advisor/ also, so /the advisor/ is serving both ways. /The black advisor/ gives me about 75 percent of my ideas, and many times compliments those I come up with. /The black advisor/ tells me how to present demands to the administration and faculty because, man, I don't know how to present demands to anyone. I don't know how to ask the Student Council for $100 to bring a black rock group to campus. They /the Student Council members/ use all that parliamentary procedure. /The black advisor/ tells me how to /draft and/ present /my proposal/ and I'll write it up. Until I learn how to do it, I'll be dependent on /the black advisor/. I couldn't do without /the black advisor/ at all...."

This magnificent testimony about the role and function of a black advisor on a white college campus is significant. It explains why a higher proportion of black students are more inclined to go to the black advisor rather than to white faculty members for help with strictly academic matters such as registration and the choosing of classes and instructors. Slightly more than one-third of the black students in the colleges in our study turned to the black advisor for assistance in these matters compared with approximately one-sixth who turned to white faculty members for academic advice. For

extra-curricula activity such as finding a job around the campus, again the black students are more inclined to consult the black advisor than to approach a white administrator. In fact, 53 percent of the black students reported that they would go to the black advisor for help in finding a job compared with 15 percent who thought the office of the dean was a more appropriate place to find employment assistance. Not only do black students express an overwhelming need for black advisors, they also press for more black faculty. Particularly do they feel the need for black faculty members to teach courses that focus on the black experience.

Our study obtained indicatinns of the expectations which black students hold for black faculty members beyond their teaching functions. The expectations reported are those which black students hold which are unique and different from expectations in the student body at large. These expectations are held by a majority of the black students. First of all, they believe that black faculty members should place loyalty to the race above loyalty to the college. This point of view was clearly articulated when the black students indicated that they believed black faculty should bypass channels in order to get something done or should break school rules when such violations occurred in the interest of blacks.

While most black students realize that black faculty members ought to work with the entire student body, at least four out of every ten would prefer that blacks work only with blacks. This expectation held by a minority, nevertheless a sizeable one, of the black students probably is at variance with the views of the student body at large more than any other expectation for black faculty members. Approximately 90 percent of the white students believe that black faculty members should work with all students. The ex-

pectations of black students for black faculty constitute a potential source of stress which could result in strained relationships between black faculty and white members of the campus community. The double loyalties which the black faculty member is expected to hold--loyalty to the race and its members and loyalty to the college and its constituents--could come into conflict with each other and generate severe cross pressures for black faculty members.

In summary, the data and analysis presented in this paper about the student-teacher relationships of black students on white college campuses indicate that:

1. Faculty members are significant and important figures in the lives of all students, black and white.
2. Black and white students often think and talk about their teachers outside the classroom but are limited in their actual contact with faculty beyond scheduled classes.
3. Many black students distrust white administrators and faculty members, believing them to be engaged in a conspiracy against blacks, despite college initiated campaigns for recruitment of blacks.
4. Black advisors are necessary and essential links of trust between black students and white institutions.
5. Black students expect black administrators and black professors to put loyalty to the race above loyalty to the school and to break college rules and regulations, if necessary, to protect the interest of black students.
6. White students expect black faculty members to be full participating members in the college community who are available to all students--

black, brown, and white, and who fulfill the requirements of the institution by enforcing college rules and regulations even if the enforcement of such affects black students adversely.

7. These conflicting expectations could become a source of stress for black teaching and administrative personnel on white college campuses and result in strained relationships between black teachers and their black and white students as well as between black teachers and their white administrative and faculty colleagues.

Table 1

STUDENTS' OPINIONS OF FACULTY
(per cent)

Students agree that...	Black	White
In general faculty are willing to talk with students about their ideas[a]	78.8 (165)	92.2 (205)
Generally faculty are receptive to students' new ideas[b]	74.7 (162)	81.3 (203)
Professors try to provoke arguments and discussions in class, the livelier the better[b]	48.8 (162)	48.5 (202)
Students in this school are allowed to pursue their individual interests in their work[b]	44.5 (162)	65.4 (202)
Teamwork and co-operation are strongly emphasized[b]	40.5 (163)	43.0 (202)

a.
per cent "willing" and "somewhat willing" responses

b.
per cent "strongly agree" and "agree" responses

Table 2

STUDENT OPINION OF FACULTY
(per cent)

Students agree that....[a]	Black	White
Evaluation of classroom work by faculty is conducted in a fair manner	55.8 (163)	73.2 (201)
The procedures in approaching most of the student's work are defined for him	54.6 (163)	38.3 (201)
Faculty expect all students to conform to a fairly standardized level of performance	86.5 (163)	73.8 (202)
Rigidly adhered to, standardized procedures are employed in evaluating our work	32.5 (163)	45.4 (203)

a. per cent "strongly agree" and "agree" responses